

TONI MORRISON: THE ICON OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

SYED MUJAHID

Faculty Member, Department of English, V. S. University P. G. Centre, Kavali, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century is likely to witness the richest vein of women's literature that contributed much to the African-American literature. Women writers have made a remarkable strides in the field of literature and generously expressed their frustrations, struggles, dilemma, disappointments, sufferings, hopes, aspirations and frustrations, and also their successful experiences in their writings. Of these, the Black women have reshaped and redefined the African-American literature because they suffered from the 'twin burden' of being Black and female. Being black they suffered from racism; being females they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white patriarchs as well as the blacks. Most of the Black writers have been successful in presenting their protagonists as womanists who succeed in creating a new social order based on love and respect for all living things. As a writer inspired by such a noble vision, Toni Morrison, one of the foremost contemporary African-American women novelists, tries to project the black experience, particularly the black female experience, and celebrates the black community. In this paper an attempt is made to make a study of Toni Morrison's feminist perspective with an assertion of black courage.

KEYWORDS: African-American Literature, Treatment of Women, Racism, Sexism, Classism, Alienation, Oppression, Depression, Black Feminist Consciousness, Freedom, Equality, Quest for Self, Womanhood, Slavery, Cultural Identity

INTRODUCTION

African-American literature is "the body of writing or performed art produced by African slaves and their descendents in America." (Dinah Birch 42). The genre traces its origins in the works of such late 18th century writers as Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano, William Wells Brown, and Frederick Douglass, with slave narratives where the authors describe the gradual achievement of freedom against extraordinary odds, including draconian laws against slave literacy in some states, and the 'Harlem Renaissance'. It also tended to incorporate within itself oral forms such as spirituals, sermons, gospel music, blues and rap.

The development of African-American literature began more than 200 years ago. The first published African-American poet was Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784), a slave whose book of poems entitled *Poems on Various Subjects* appeared in 1773, three years before American Independence. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before the Civil War, slave narratives also emerged as a popular form of protest literature. Though white abolitionists often penned slave narratives for political purposes, many former slaves, including Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, among thousands of others, also wrote slave narratives about their personal experiences.

African-American writers primarily concentrated on the slave narratives and the African American texts establish themselves as a medium of propaganda. These narratives were made under the guidance and approval of white abolitionists. Right from its inception, the African American texts developed a literary institution that generated the values of the dominant culture. Even before the slave narratives, criticism of the African American texts exerted a prescriptive

influence as seen in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787). In the words of Bajaj Nirmal, one perceives two distinct features in African American literature : "One is its racist attitude and the second the Forms of things unknown that is the spontaneous, expressive writings deriving from black folk forms." (*Perspectives of Afro-American Fiction : Perspectives on the Afro-American Novel* 7).

The predicament of African-American women is a universal factor right from the birth of woman irrespective of any race. She has been deprived of her essential right to continue as a human being because she has been brought in the 17th century to America as a slave to champion capitalism. As a susceptible black woman she has endured as she has impelled to arrange herself for the slave market, which has been the bereavement of her racial honour and destroyed of her humanity ending in the restraint of her own alternativeness of herself. A surface of a black woman's life that equips shrewdness into her internal actuality is widely stressed by her sexual life. The particular method followed by white man to enslave black woman is 'rape' and that later implanted horror in nature because she feels alone being apart from her culture of the aboriginal land. There is a regular degeneration of sexual assail of the black woman by the white man which is in the after effects of the Civil War.

Today, for African and African-American writers, the literature, particularly the 'novel' has been an important vehicle of expression. The novelists, from William Wells Brown to Toni Morrison, and Gloria Naylor, have explored the lives of African people concentrating on social evils, economic disparity, racism and injustice. In the hands of these writers, African-American novel has attained the stature of a distinctive genre because it 'illuminated both the limitations and possibilities of human conditions,' from the perspectives of the blacks. It continues to build on and redefine the foundation of literature in the United States, with the contribution made by such prominent women novelists as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor, securing a popular and diverse audience and inspiring a large output of critical scholarship.

The novels of these women writers primarily deal with the exploitation of the black women. Most of these writers were deprived of the basic principles of liberty, equality, and justice, enshrined in the American constitution. The white American culture too forced these women to search for their dignity and identity. All these women novelists realize that without continuity of place, the consciousness of the emerging artist is threatened. They had to write about their place. They had to define their roles as individuals, family members, especially as woman, wife and mother, and as the nurtures of their own culture by incorporated Black folktales, myths, and so on. The African American novel therefore is more a quest for identity of the black community in general and black women in particular.

In recent times, the African-American literature that began within the black community has now reached a large, diverse, international audience and contributed to the revitalization and expansion of American culture. The themes and subjects have expanded widely, more than ever it is nearly impossible to group the work of African-American authors under a single heading. Thus, African American literature became a vital and enduring part of American literature today.

Toni Morrison, a leading African-American woman novelist, is one of the most significant, prominent and relevant writers on the contemporary literary scene. Morrison is the first of the African-American woman novelist to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Her place in American letters leaves her standing next to such eminent writers such as Thoreau, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and William Faulkner. She ranks worldwide with great masters like - Dostoevsky and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. She has been amply recognized for her combined greatness as a voice for black people and as a master craftsperson of the dominant literary artistic form.

Morrison describes herself as a “black woman novelist”, and all her novels deal with African-American characters and communities. From her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* to her most recent, Morrison has explored the African-American experience, and by extension, the human experience. She belongs to the tradition and a group of African-American women writers – Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Zora Neale Hurston, and Paul Marshall – for whom writing is a liberating tool, a subversive strategy and an artistic mode of self-expression. Her fictional writings have a variety of thematic dimensions, and her treatment of contemporary problems has a depth and magnitude not frequently found in the other writer’s works. Her novels raise the themes and issues of racism, sexism, classism, culture, religion, slavery, freedom, equality, quest for identity, alienation, fragmentation, aspirations and frustrations. Like William Golding’s, her novels have a fabulistic quality as she has been directly influenced by African-American folk tales. Like George Eliot, she has a rare gift for characterization. In her explorations of such complex social, political and philosophical concerns, Morrison acknowledges that reality is ambiguous and that truth is frequently impossible to apprehend. Catherine Rainwater, in addressing the principal themes in Morrison’s works, has stated that “Morrison’s novels are strategic attacks on ‘innocent’ readers, who assume that art or any other form of human communication carries reliable messages to or from the obscure territory of the inner self.” (*‘Worthy Messengers : Narrative Voices in Toni Morrison’s Novels’* 96). In awarding Toni Morrison the Nobel Prize for Literature, the *Swedish Academy* praised her for giving “life to an essential aspect of American reality in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import.” (*Swedish Academy*, 1993).

Of all the African-American women writers, Toni Morrison is perhaps considered the best writer for depicting the predicament of black women in her novels. She expressed her views on the predicament of black women in an Interview with Rosemarie K. Lester, thus : “Black women are much more suited to aggressiveness in the mode that feminists are recommending, because they have always been both mother and labourer and worker, and the history of black women in the States is an extremely painful and unattractive one, but there are parts of that history that were conducive to doing more, rather than less, in the days of slavery. We think of slave women as women in the house, but they were not, most of them worked in the fields along with men. They were required to do physical labour in competition with them, so that their relations with each other turned out to be more comradeship than male dominance / female subordination.” (“An Interview with Toni Morrison” 48-49).

The novelist, with her works, motivates the black women to discover through self-realization who they are by understanding and learning their history and what their fate is and how they are progressing to revive and rehabilitate it. She personally feels that African-Americans, particularly have to rely on oral tradition and folklore to protect their conviction because the opportunity to be educated has been prohibited during slavery. She has also seized a historical strategy to rebuild African-American culture and history of slavery. She positions women at the core of her novels.

The writer proudly presents herself as a branch on ancient tree of black assertiveness and self-definition that is richly and deeply rooted in the folk culture. As a Black Cultural Nationalist, she “Validates black culture, and reaffirms its adaptive survival power, its creativity amidst oppression, life-affirming qualities as well as its ancient wisdom and humanity and its capacity for survival.” (Harry Read 50). Like William Faulkner, Toni Morrison wants to write regional literature, which is at once specific and universal, and get it published all over the world. In other words, she delves deep into the particular in order to reach the universal. This is made very clear when she says to Thomas LeClair :

“If I tried to write a universal novel, it would be water. Behind this question is the

suggestion that to write for black people is somehow to diminish the writing.

From my perspective, there are only black people. When I say “people”, that’s what I

mean. Lots of books written by black people about black people have had this

“university” as a burden. They were writing for some readers other than me.”

(“The Language Must Not Sweet : A Conversation with Toni Morrison” 28).

Much of what the novelist writes individually as a black woman writer eventually leads to the universal condition of being human. Her ability to transform the individual into universal forces and idiosyncrasies into inevitabilities has led some critics to call her the “D.H. Lawrence of the black psyche.”

Her approach is primarily based on her own experiences and observations which have deeply stirred her creative faculty with an inspiration to assimilate the operative elements of slavery into her fictive world. As a true artist, she has transmuted the reality with an artistic objectivity keeping far apart her personal involvement. She is essentially a black writer, yet she has dealt with the motif of slavery in a manner that reflects a balanced view of an anti-sentimental and anti-emotional writer.

Combining the aims of the ‘Black Freedom Movement’ and ‘Women’s Liberation’, the novelist seeks to produce literature, which is irrevocably and indisputably black. Like Edward Said who exposed ‘Orientalism’ as a western style for dominating, re-structuring and having authority over the Orient, she explores the distortion of black reality by the dominant group for its vested interest. She refutes the hierarchical order shaped by the concepts of centre and periphery and questions the ideology on which the order is based. She is simultaneously engaged in the project of constructing an Afro-centric perspective, and evolving an African-American poetics.

Exploring the complexity of black female experience in white America, the novelist attempts to resolve the contradiction inherent in her African-American identity. Conscious of her own marginalization within the context of the mainstream, she starts valuing her peripheral existence. Titled as a “Black Woman Writer”, she claims to be concerned, above all, with the idea of ‘a black community’ – what such a community once meant, how it has changed, and how, despite those changes, it is and should be maintained. In an interview with Salman Rushdie, she says :

“I am not sure what the word ‘Negro’ means, which is

why I write books. What is a black child / woman / friend / mother ? What is a black person? It seems to me

that there are so many that inform blackness. One of the modern qualities of being

an African-American is the flux, is the fluidity, the contradictions.” (“An

Interview with Toni Morrison” 39).

Naturally, all her novels are an exploration of the meaning of blackness – what it means to be black in white America, to be a black woman in a white male hegemonic society, to believe in an indigenous African culture in a world that endorses only Eurocentric culture, and to strive for visibility in a society in which blackness signifies invisibility. They record the triumphs and complexities of black life from the painful past of slavery to the frustrating, racist present. In Toni Morrison’s fiction, blacks must confront the notion that all understanding is accompanied by pain, just as all comprehension of national history must include the humiliations of slavery.

All her novels artistically document the author's awareness of and concern for the historical conditions of oppression of African people in America, thereby revealing her heightened consciousness of the interrelationship of race, class and gender. Although all the three elements are present in all her novels, the emphasis on them varies from novel to novel. The novelist examines the problems of race and gender oppression before exploring class contradictions within the race. At the beginning of her writing career, she thinks that racism is the main source of oppression of blacks in white America because of her low level of gender and class consciousness. Then, becoming aware of the indispensability of the sexuality of American racism, she finds that sexism is equally oppressive. Finally, she realizes that racism and sexism are by products of capitalism – the economic systems of slavery.

The novelist uses each novel as a frame work for investigating various problems of and solution to the African's dilemmas. In each of her novels, she explores some aspect of oppression afflicting the African people. Each successive novel reflects her growing understanding of the nature of the African's oppression. As her narrative structure develops, she learns to develop her theme artistically so as to provide accurate presentation. One can perceive a progressive, thematic and structural development in her works.

As Toni Morrison develops her narrative from one novel to another novel, her concerns become more and more universal and political. Her fictional world does not marginalize men, but her focus is on the sensitive women of the African-American Diaspora. For her, each individual is different and hence she treats each with the special attention they deserve. In her novels, the black woman emerges as a woman of power. Though victimized by a racist society or skewed perceptions of others, they are galvanized into action. The black women's power resides in the strength of her conviction and her willingness to place her life in a historical perspective which recognizes her ancestral heritage. The existence of community is both her challenge and salvation. She must both protect her individuality and preserve her traditions.

While exploring the dynamics of racism, sexism and classism, Toni Morrison does not limit herself to an indictment of the dominant white class only. She turns her gaze to the problems within the black community as she relentlessly exposes intra-racism, black male brutalities, female sexual abuse, and incest. Thus, without directly denouncing the white society, she valorises the black community. By indirection the novelist avoids the polarization of black and white humanity – one as inherently good and the other as irrevocably corrupt – thereby allowing all people to vicariously experience a rebirth. Thus, the novelist brilliantly succeeds in her attempt to elevate through fictional art the reclaimable and beautiful in the human condition.

Through her novels, Toni Morrison offers the readers a fresh look at American history and the issues of cultural conflict, the outcome of cultural domination and the horrors and terrible repercussions of slavery without apology, without comment and without resolution.

In her novels, the novelist has attempted to retrieve or capture the black experience which American historical memory was trying to distort or even worst erase. In a 1988 interview with Cynthia Davis, Toni Morrison said :

“The reclamation of the history of black people in this country is of paramount

importance because while you can't really blame the conqueror for writing history

his own way, you can certainly debate it. There is a great deal of obfuscation and

distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours.” (*Toni Morrison : Critical Perspectives Past and Present* 413).

This task of recovering black experience has meant Toni Morrison’s engagement with both the past and the present and the trauma that often went with the experience. Her novels are the testament to this engagement of the novelist. While she writes out of the specificities of race, class and gender, her ultimate focus is the universal problem of the quest for identity, the relation between the individual and the communality, the problems of good and evil, love and guilt.

It is significant that in all her novels, she never depicts white society or white characters as actively condemning, criticizing or harming the black women in any way, with the exception of Tar Baby. In fact, none of her novels have any significant white characters. She demonstrates subtly that the black community itself blindly internalizes, absorbs and adheres to all the ideas presented by white society, and judges its members according to them. This can best be termed as secondary racism, prejudice which emanates not from the primary sources (white society) but from a secondary source (the black community).

As a woman writer, the novelist has felicitously chosen the feminine characters to demonstrate their plight and predicament, not in isolation, but within the stream of the social milieu, focusing on the variety of the man-woman relationship and their impact on the development of the characters. Her characters exist in a world defined by its blackness, surrounded by the white society that both violates and denies it and the oppressions in her world is more often psychic violence rather than a physical one. Her characters do not grow in the void, but evolve along the line of the mutual relationships. They do not seem to move out of this orbit. The imperceptible force of social and filial ties generally governs their destinies. Her imagination has a unique pragmatic dimension that displays the artistic beauty of craftsmanship in elevating the common place to the point of sublimation by her narrative technique. Her naturalistic approach instils life to the very stuff of pettiness. Homes and families look real and vibrant, dynamic and fascinating. Barbara Christian notes that :

[At] first glance, each of her novels may seem to be primarily about one character:

Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, Sula in *Sula*, and Milkman Dead in *Song of Solomon*.

But as we read the novels, what impresses us is not only these characters, but their blood relations. The people from whom the major characters derive their sense of themselves are as memorable, as finely drawn, as the focal characters. (*Black Feminist Criticism* 47).

Her protagonists are usually characters in transition, journeying through mysterious circumstances and personal histories to the innermost psyche, often to a triumphant discovery of self-hood. People are as varied as the colours in a box of crayons or a painter’s palette. They are young and old, rich and poor, sane and insane, good and evil, alive and dead. The novelist never clones her characters. They often struggle with some of the same issues, but handle them in a variety of ways. Her body of work contains several contrasting characters.

‘Quest for self’ is a motivating and organizing device in her fiction, as is the role of family and community in

nurturing or challenging the individual. In *The Times Literary Supplement*, Jennifer Uglow suggested that, Toni Morrison's novels explore in particular the process of growing up black, female and poor. The novelist concentrates on the relationship between the pressures of the community, patterns established within families and the developing sense of self. Dorothy H. Lee says that : "Toni Morrison is pre-occupied with the effect of the community on the individual's achievement and retention of an integrated, acceptable self. In treating this subject, she draws recurrently on myth and legend for story pattern and characters, returning repeatedly to the theory of quest. The goals her characters seek to achieve are similar in their deepest implications, and yet the degree to which they attain them varies radically because each novel is cast in unique human terms." ("The Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Toni Morrison" 346).

Toni Morrison made her debut as a novelist in 1970 with *The Bluest Eye* and soon gained attention for her poetic imagery, fabulistic quality, richly expressive depictions of black America, and the wonderful richness and variety of her language. Set in a small mid western town in Lorain, Ohio during the depression, *The Bluest Eye* makes one of the most powerful attacks yet on the relationship between western standards of female beauty and the psychological oppression of black women. It mainly focuses on racial oppression. The novel focuses on Pecola, an eleven-year-old black girl who believes she is ugly and longs for blue eyes. Her fixation leads to insanity where she withdraws into a world of fantasy. The novelist addresses the conflict between black identity and white cultural values, and the psychological and emotional effects of victimization. She demonstrates the influence of European white beauty on the self image of the African-American female child.

The second novel *Sula* (1973) mainly lays stress on gender violence. The novelist is concerned with the struggle for individual rights in general and woman's rights in particular. It is a novel about black women's friendships and about good and evil. *Sula* not only breaks with popular stereotypes of black women in western literature, but creates one of the few black women heroines to deliberately embrace the role of a pariah. *Sula* had a wider perception than *The Bluest Eye* and brought her national recognition.

The third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), which received the "National Book Critics Award" and the "Friends of American Writers Award", established Toni Morrison as a major American Woman novelist. It is the first of her novels to have a male character as a primary protagonist. The novel deals with the issue of class in relation to race and gender. *Song of Solomon* creates a magical world out of four generations of black life in America. The power of the novel is in her use of black mythology and the strength of its elements of black culture. It is a story of Milkman Dead, who is torn between the altruistic values of his aunt and materialism of his father embarks on a journey where he discovers the greatness of African American heritage and the nature of love and faith. Toni Morrison was highly appreciated for her portrayal of Milkman's spiritual transformation and critics lauded her marvellous blending of fantasy and realism.

The fourth novel is *Tar Baby* (1981). It is a truly public novel about the condition of society, examining the relationships between blacks and whites, men and women, and civilization and nature. The novel changes the location from the geographical boundaries of the United States to the larger context of the Caribbean and Europe. It is filled with allusion of African-American folklore and mythology. In this novel the novelist has shown that racism and sexism emerge from capitalism. The novel focuses on the relationship between Jadine Child, a black educated model and William Greene called Son. The novel is set on an isolated West Indian Island of Isle de Chevaliers, examines the conflicts that arise when one attempts 'to deny one's past'. It is the story of a man in search of nourishment and of a woman whose nourishing powers have been defused. The book is praised for its provocative themes and beautiful, complex symbolism.

The fifth novel *Beloved* (1987), is a master piece of her fiction which won the 'Pulitzer Prize for fiction'. It deals with the history of slavery. It is the story of what happens in the silences of trauma. The novel reveals the lives of its two main characters, Sethe and Paul D. Both are former slaves trying to create lives for themselves in the wake of decimating and pervasive personal histories. Both are forever marked by the legacy of their individual experiences with American slavery. It is an attempt to enter the consciousness of individuals who were enslaved and to animate the feelings that must have been associated with so much uncertainty, loss, and violation. In the novel, the personification is made manifest in the character Beloved that can be seen as a representation, a personification of all the trauma and catastrophic human cost of the Middle Passage and slavery. It also artistically dramatizes a haunting amalgam of the past and present experiences of an escaped female slave, tracing the heroine's quest for meaning and wholeness in slavery and in freedom. The novelist sketches the events that led to Sethe's crime and focuses on how the stories of the past have been inscribed on the bodies of black women. Though critics have contended the depiction of violence and humiliation in the novel, Toni Morrison's rendering of slavery and its psychological manifestations can be considered the most affecting in contemporary American literature.

The sixth novel is *Jazz* (1992), the second of a trilogy of Toni Morrison's novels reflecting on the idea of love and its manifestations. It depicts the Harlem of 1920s as a symbol of freedom and excitement for many African-Americans. It tells the story of the New York neighbourhood Harlem from the perspective of its ordinary inhabitants, namely Joe and Violet Trace. The couple is at the centre of the novel's investigation of the complexities faced by those millions of African Americans who moved from the rural South to the North during the Great Migration in search of jobs and a better life in the cities. Thus, it is a disturbing psychological study of a childless African-American couple desperately seeking to come to terms with their frustrations and aspirations. Their fragmented, directionless lives propel them towards the grotesque and the absurd. Toni Morrison has used the mode of Jazz to depict the experience of the black community in the city of New York during the 1920's, a decade itself known as Jazz age. *Jazz* brings out the cultural unconscious of history that sustains in good as well as bad times.

Paradise (1997) is her seventh novel. It is her first novel after winning the Nobel Prize for literature. It is the third in the series of her novels exploring themes from African-American history. It is an exploration of the impact of and desire for control of human behaviour. It is a story set in a small Oklahoma community and coils back and forth through a century of imagined history to explain the intention behind a group of men attack a convent, now occupied by unconventional women fleeing from abusive husbands or unhappy pasts. Moving freely between eras, Toni Morrison explores the founding of Ruby, an all-black township, the backgrounds of the convent women and the men determined to kill them. *Beloved* is about slavery. *Jazz* deals with urban life in the jazz era; and *Paradise* is set in contemporary times. It is inspired by the stories of all black communities established after slavery came to an end. In *Paradise*, the African-American women of various ages and various backgrounds find freedom and happiness in isolation from a racial and sexually oppressive society in a convent in Oklahoma far away from everywhere.

Love (2003) is her eighth novel. This novel is Toni Morrison's elegy for the vital black society that was lost with desegregation. The novel is a Faulknerian symphony of passion and hatred, power and perversity, colour and class that spans three generations of black women in a fading beach town. In life, Bill Cosey enjoyed the affections of many women, who would do almost anything to gain his favour. In death, his hold on them - Wife, daughter, granddaughter, and

employee, mistress may be even stronger. As her protagonists stake their furious claim on Cosey's memory and the estate, using everything from intrigue to outright violence, she creates a work that is shrewd, funny, erotic, and heart wrenching.

A Mercy (2008) is her ninth novel. In this novel, the novelist goes back to the beginning of slavery in America in the late seventeenth century, a period during which America was far more diverse and more complex than is generally imagined today. It provides a detailed outlook at the social environment of class distinction, racial hatred and religious persecution that allowed the institution of slavery to take root in the U.S. With broad strokes of history the writer tries to explore the impact on the personal choices of individuals caught in history. The novel includes Portuguese, Dutch, English, Native American, African, and mixed-race characters, all vying for a place in this new world. Neither religious freedom nor religious tolerance is given, and while the Southern colonies are clearly strongholds of slavery, the North is by no means an innocent bystander. Diseases such as measles and smallpox run rampant. Nevertheless, there is an Eden-like quality in the beauty and richness of this new world, along with many decencies that transcend the evil elements.

Home (2012) is her 10th novel, the shortest one with 150 pages, published in 2012. This is also Toni Morrison's one of the few male-protagonist novels besides her deviation from writing epic-length books. In *Home*, the novelist returns to the 1950s, an era she remembers, to mine the traumatic possibilities of the Korean war and of biological experiments on African-Americans. It is a deeply moving novel about an apparently defeated man finding his manhood - and his home. *Home* is a taut and tortured story about one man's desperate search for himself in a world disfigured by war. It tells the story of Frank Money, the novel's main character, a 24-year-old African-American veteran traumatized by his experiences in the Korean War. He has been back in America for a year, but feels too violent and dislocated to go home to Georgia, where his younger sister still lives. *Home* begins with a dreamlike sequence in which two children - a brother and sister - witness a horrific event while out roaming the Georgia countryside.

All the novels deal with the dominant themes like reconstruction of self-hood, the quest for wholeness, consecutiveness of the individual to the community, a celebration of black's sexuality and sisterhood, deep maternal bonds, human understanding, religious appeal and so on. In this way, Toni Morrison comes to terms with both the dilemma confronting African people in America and a part of the solution that must be embraced by them. The novels make clear the facts that blacks in America suffer from a crisis of the African personality, stemming from a three-pronged oppression of race, gender, and class. Each successive novel reflects her growing understanding of the nature of a solution to the African dilemma. The novels also make clear that the primary enemy of the Africans in America is not so much racism or sexism as capitalism in all its disguises. It is further made clear that the solution to the African's plight lies not in the individual, but in the collective class struggle against capitalism and in gender solidarity. Furthermore, Morrison crystallizes the strategy of political education through communication with ushers in the solution - collective struggle. Thus, Toni Morrison's novels reflect a thematic and a structural evolution that coincides with her own growing class consciousness.

Toni Morrison through her novels reveals the meaning of life, focusing more and more on the community rather than the individual. To her, community matters much and it is the whole human community. In each of her novels, she makes an attempt to reveal the value of the community. All her novels are like the magnificent artistic design weaved together beautifully where all colours are mingled and it is difficult to separate one from the other. They grow untidily and unanimously. In all her writings, Toni Morrison is concerned about crafting a special, clarifying angle for remembering the past and making it a useful mechanism for survival in the contemporary world.

As a writer with an extraordinary mind, her novels gained attention of both critics and wider audience for her epic power, an unerring ear for dialogue and her richly expressive and poetically charged depictions of black America. Her work of literary criticism established her as a genius who has probed the complex recesses of African American history and culture. Henry Louis Gates Jr. has described Toni Morrison as a “subtle craftsperson and a compelling weaver of tales” and “the most formally sophisticated novelist in the history of African American literature”. (*Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* ix). It is precisely Toni Morrison’s subtle and challenging craft that fascinates and attracts the readers.

Toni Morrison’s exclusiveness in projecting the characters lies in her universality. She does not claim as a black feminist like Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker, and Gayle Jones. Her novels break the boundaries of mere racism and sexism. She tries to find out the causes and solution to the social evil. To present them effectively, she embroiders her novels by myths, folklore, legends, black culture, and community value. She describes the relationship of the present and the past with stream of consciousness technique. Though there are ample of images like twinkling stars in the Toni Morrison’s world, they express diversity. There is variety of subject and theme. Her each novel contains a different treatment. Each of her images and each of her novel stand as an independent individual. Her novels express variety of black experience. Densie Heinze claims : “Each novel moves forward to a new concern, but without having completely left behind previous ones, thus, the movement in both linear and circular, a Yeatsian gyre that spins back on itself but inevitably leads upward to new ways of seeing old system of belief.” (*The Dilemma of “Double Consciousness” : Toni Morrison’s Novels* 12).

The ultimate message of the novelist is that,

“Each person should and must respect the reality of the human landscape
of the world, with its unlimited possibilities and interpretations, if
mankind is to achieve wholeness and if the global community is to once
again be whole.” (Wilfred D. Samuels & Clenora Hudson-Weems 142).

It is not just in the field of literature that Toni Morrison has become the touchstone, as the winning of the Nobel Prize suggests. She has, indeed, become the symbol of African-America, of human struggle against various kinds of oppression, and, above all, of the global longing for liberation.

To sum up, through her scholarship and writing skills, Toni Morrison grabs a high place and dazzles on the top of black American literature. Through her world of fiction, she breaks the boundaries of racism, classism and sexism liberates her women and places them in the paradise. Even she grants warm human touch to her characters. Each of her novels is the celebration of black culture, folklore and community. With her sharpened glaze, she possesses a power of altering the picture of African-American literature.

REFERENCES

1. Birch, Dinah. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.
2. Nirmal, Bajaj. *Perspectives of Afro-American Fiction: Perspectives on the Afro-American Novel*, ed. Tarlochan Singh Anand, Jalandhar : ABS Publications, 1983. Print.

3. Rainwater, Catherine. "Worthy Messengers : Narrative Voices in Toni Morrison's Novels," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. XXXIII, I, Spring, 1991. Print.
4. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993." (Press release). *Swedish Academy*. 07-10-1993. Retrieved 01-06-2009. Print.
5. Lester, K. Rosemarie. "An Interview with Toni Morrison," ed. Nellie Y. McKay, *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Boston : G.K. Hall & Co., 1988. Print.
6. Read, Harry. "Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Black Cultural Nationalism", *Centennial Review*. 32, Winter, 1988. Print.
7. LeClair, Thomas. "The Language Must Not Sweet: A Conversation with Toni Morrison", *New Republic*. 21 March 1981. Print.
8. Rushdie, Salman. "An Interview with Toni Morrison", *Brick*. 44, Summer 1992. Print.
9. Davies, Cynthia. "Interview with Toni Morrison" in *Toni Morrison : Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and K.A. Appiah, New York : Amistad, 1993. Print.
10. Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1991. Print.
11. Lee, Dorothy H. "The Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Toni Morrison," in *Black Women Writers 1950-80: A Critical Evaluation*. ed. Mari Evans, New York : Anchor Press, 1985. Print.
12. Gates, Henry Louis Jr. & Appiah. K. A. *Alice Walker : Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York : Amistad, 1993. Print.
13. Heinze, Denise. *The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness : Toni Morrison's Novels*. Athens : University of Georgia Press, 1993. Print.
14. Samuels, Wilfred D. & Clenora Hudson-Weems. eds. *Toni Morrison*. Boston : Twayne Publishers, 1990. Print.

